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F-Wills, Garry
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ORC 1 MAFIA
C 15720, Fiere

Garry Wills

Breaking the FBI's Spirit— the Sooner Done, the Better

There is always more, down at the mucky bottom of the FBI barrel. Now we know that J. Edgar Hoover spied on Helen Keller and lied about doing it. Her crime was to belong to the American Civil Liberties Union, which was watched for half a century with a cranky zealot's suspicion. Three Nobel laureates were spied on. Add the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and it becomes clear that Hoover thought winning an international award was prima facie evidence of un-Americanism.

We are told, now, that prosecuting a New York agent for illegal acts might break the morale of the FBI. I devoutly hope so. The more one learns of that body's spirit and mystique, the less we should want to preserve them.

I just received more reports released to the Socialist Workers party on the FBI's attempt to "disrupt or cancel" an antiwar meeting at Catholic University in 1971—disrupted secretly, of course, to guarantee that "full security is protected as [to] source of action."

What right had the FBI to disrupt or cancel a legal gathering, approved by university officials, on a campus hardly pro-Communist, an activity guaranteed by the First Amendment? Here is the chilling answer, out of Washington: "It is the opinion of the bureau decisive, aggressive, timely and well-organized counterintelligence operations are invaluable in disrupting or altering, to our advantage, activities which are clearly against U.S. public interest."

This is not the language of a law-enforcement agency but of a brainwashing outfit which decides in secret what Ameri-

cans should be allowed to hear; where they can speak; what they can say, and then manipulates people, outside the law, to bring about results "to our advantage."

The means are as grimy as the ends. The bureau sent out, from Washington, the announcement that this meeting "cries out for every possible counterintelligence technique to be utilized to disrupt or cancel the conference." Any one who has paid attention knows that "any technique" means the FBI was again deciding to break the law, to encourage violence and act as outlaw "agents provocateurs."

Here is one plan suggested in response to Washington's cry: "The preparation of a crude leaflet of the Black Panther party in which the conference is denounced as a racist, liberal gathering which failed to invite the Panthers to participate. The leaflet would urge a complete boycott of the affair by all whites who identified with the Panther line. The leaflet could also intimate that Panthers could do everything within their power to assure success of boycott." This was written at a time when the FBI itself was urging the view that the Panthers were a danger to the nation's very existence. To say that this extremist outfit would do "everything within their power" was inviting paranoia.

Team spirit and morale were obviously very high in the FBI when calls from Washington led agents to think of using their own doomsday bogey against a lawful gathering on an American campus—and using it to encourage the bureau's self-fulfilling prophecy of violence as the



inevitable result of any such gathering. (The gathering was held, without violence, despite all the bureau's provocative efforts.)

Where did the Central Intelligence Agency get its confidence that it could use the Mafia against Fidel Castro? Why should it hesitate to make that attempt, when J. Edgar Hoover—one of the most honored American institutions—for nearly half a century had used illegal means to block legal activities he disapproved of?

It takes a peculiarly godlike view of oneself to think one can, like Jehovah in the book of Job, use the devil to shape up one's servants, to test and purify them. That was the secret of the bureau's confidence, self-righteousness and loyalty; its assumption of moral superiority in the very act of stooping to vile crimes. And that spirit still lives in the bureau. We see it in the assumption that no agent should ever be called to account for his illegal acts. The demonstrations for Agent Kearney in New York offer vivid proof that the bureau's belief it is above the law continues to this day. That is the morale that should be broken. The sooner the better.